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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

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U. S. DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE
OFFICE OF INFORMATION

Monday, October 23, 1944

Subject: COUNT THE CALORIES Information from the Nutritionists and Home Economists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

It's Monday and wash day. You need lots of energy today. What with getting the children off to school, doing the house work, putting out the family laundry, you're on the move all day long. There are a thousand and one turns.

You don't have to stop to think how much energy you spend on house work. But has it occurred to you, as you raced from the breakfast dishes to the pile of clothes in the basement, that practically all of your energy comes from food? Measured by the yardstick of good nutrition, you'll use between 2500 and 3,000 calories today. Hope you started off with a good breakfast.

Counting calories began back in grandma's day. Congress made a small appropiation in 1894 for the study of human nutrition. And the scientists who planned the research used half the money to carry on a study of the relation between food and energy. Three pioneers in this work were Professors W. O. Atwater, E. B. Rosa and F.G.Benedict.

These three men built a respiration calorimeter in the basement of the chemical laboratory of Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut. This was simply a copper lined chamber large enough for a man to live in. College students served as subjects in the expermints. And the scientists measured the food they ate and the energy they spent.

As the result of the work of Atwater,Rosa and Benedict and of other scientists who followed them, we've learned a great deal about the energy needs of men. We've also learned about the energy value of food. Today, we can measure this value with great precision.

For example, we know that a generous pat of butter or margarine- about a half an ounce- supplies us with a hundred calories. We get a hundred calories from a good-sized apple or from a fair-sized potato. Two-thirds of a cup of milk will provide a hundred calories.

Back in our grade school physiology call, we learned that carbohydrates, fats and proteins are the three main constituents of food. We find one or more of these constituents in all of our food. All three are in milk.

Sugar and starches are typical carbohydrates. Lean meat and eggs are well-known proteins. Cream, meat fats, butter and oleomargerine are typical fats. Scientists have worked out the energy values of all foods. They tell us there are more than twice as many calories in a pound of fats as there are in the same amount of carbohydrates or the same amount of protein.

I spoke a few minutes ago of the yardstick of good nutrition. That's our term for the recommended dietary allowances of the National Research Council. In other words, this yardstick provides a measure to show how many calories you need. How many your husband requires. How many your children should have.

A very active man, according to this yardstick, needs 4500 calories a day. By very active, we mean one who does heavy outdoor labor. The army plans meals that supply a man at camp in this country with 4,000 calories a day. Then the soldier adds to this supply by eating snacks between meals....food from home or from the post exchange.

A man who has a sedentary job...who does desk work and rides from home to work... needs only 2500 calories a day, according to the yardstick of good nutrition. The caloric requirement depends in part on the amount and kind of work you do. It also depends on your size.

An active woman doesn't require so many calories as an active man. The yardstick of good nutrition allows the active woman 3,000 calories a day. The woman who does light housework and takes no special exercise, or the woman office worker needs only 2100 calories a day.

Healthy children will be active whether their parents are or not. Allow 1200 calories for your three-year old child. See that the older children, the boys and girls of 10, 11 and 12 years old, get around 2500 calories a day.

What about counting calories, you ask? In planning meals, these days, we're more likely to think in terms of vitamins and minerals than in terms of calories. Most of us feel that if we eat the basic seven foods we need for good health, the calories will take care of themselves. And there's a lot of commonsense in that attitude. But if you're cutting down on calories in your own debt, cut down on foods that pack the most calories - fats, starches and sweets. See that you get the basic 7 foods in your three meals a day. And chances are that you'll have all the calories you need.

You'll find a handy guide to your food groups and to the quantities you should buy for each member of the family in a leaflet called "Family Food Plans for Good Nutrition". You can get a copy of this leaflet by writing the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C.

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